

Professional Inquiry Project Assignment

Purposes:

- Discover, thoughtfully frame, and systematically explore answers to your questions about teaching and learning (INTASC Standard 9 – Reflective Practice & Professional Development)
- Use professional reading to develop a [research-based repertoire](#) of instructional strategies that help secondary students meet each of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (INTASC Standards 1 – Content Knowledge, 2 – Learner Development, 4 – Instructional Strategies, & 7 – Planning for Instruction)
- [Critically evaluate](#) the [credibility](#) of research-based information and its applicability to your teaching context (INTASC Standard 9 – Reflective Practice & Professional Development)
- Participate professionally in the school community, in [professional organizations](#) and [professional development activities](#), and engage in [professional dialogue and reflection with colleagues](#) to improve yourself and your program (INTASC Standards 9 – Reflective Practice & Professional Development, 10 – Community)

Instructions:

- 1) Identify Your Topic** - Reflect on the things you have observed and experienced regarding world language education up to this point. Use them, in conjunction with the questions below, to help you identify a topic that you would like to know more about:
 - What concerns or frustrations trouble you?
 - What contradictions or paradoxes bother you?
 - What kinds of things do you find yourself taking notes about?
 - What recurring topics do other teachers in your building discuss?
 - What school-related things do you find yourself talking a lot about?
 - What have you observed or experienced that puzzles you?
 - What unresolved “issues” nag at you?
- 2) Narrow Your Topic** - Once you have decided on a topic of inquiry, try to define more precisely what it is you want to know. Although it may seem counterintuitive, one technique for narrowing a topic is to first “explode the topic” by brainstorming as many different connections to it as you can on a blank concept map.

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3) Frame Your Research Question - Once you have decided what you think you want to know, you are ready to frame your research question. One way to do this is to review your concept map, looking for commonalities, contradictions, inconsistencies, missing information, and/or unclear relationships. They are signposts that will help direct the framing of your question:

- What do the ideas that you have captured in the various bubbles have in common? (The answer can point your research question in a particular direction)
- Which bubbles seem to belong with more than one cluster? (These are probably important ideas that you need to make sure are included as an element of your research question)
- What are the relationships between the bubbles and which relationships are not entirely clear to you? (It might help to jot a few key words that describe each relationship on the lines that connect the bubbles. Relationships that are not clear usually signal that there is something you do not understand that needs further investigation.)
- Are there any clusters that do not seem well-developed? (These are generally either areas that aren't relevant to your main topic in any significant way, or areas that will be fruitful for exploration because you don't know enough about them)

4) Refine Your Question – Strong inquiry is all about asking questions that help you cut away unimportant details and get under the surface of the issue you have chosen. Consequently, you need to sharpen your research question. One way to do this is to search existing research and scholarship to find out how others have approached your topic, what they have learned about it, and what they still don't know about it. I have posted a list of search tips and tricks here <http://msugrads.wikispaces.com/Research+Resources> that will help you do this more efficiently and effectively.

5) Make a Research Plan - Identify the people, places, or resources you could consult in order to get more information about your topic. It is generally a good idea to get information from at least 3 different kinds of sources (artifacts/documents, audio/videotapes, existing research, field notes, interviews, journals, observations, photographs, questionnaires, surveys, tests). This is called *triangulation*. Once you know what data you need, you should develop an outline of your plan and a timeline for completing the inquiry project.

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- 6) **Obtain Necessary Permissions** – Once you know what data you would like to collect, you will need to obtain the appropriate permissions. You should consult with your principal and your mentor teacher. In addition, many school districts have a form you need to complete that must be approved by their committee that oversees research projects. If you intend to audiotape, photograph, or videotape students or their work, you should obtain written permission to do so from their parents/guardians and from the students themselves. This is called “informed consent.”
- 7) **Develop Necessary Instruments** – Once you have secured the appropriate permissions to conduct the inquiry, you will need to find, adapt, or develop any tools you will need for collecting and recording your data (such as interview protocols, surveys, or questionnaires).
- 8) **Collect Data** – Begin administering your surveys, doing the interviews and observations, gathering the information, etc.
- 9) **Analyze the Data** – Once you have collected all of your data, you need to spend some time reviewing it, summarizing it, and thinking about what it might mean. This could involve tallying results, transcribing interviews and looking for themes across them, or making a concept map of key ideas.
- 10) **Interpret the Data** - As you work with the data, ask yourself what story (or set of stories) it is trying to tell you. Try to consider as many alternative hypotheses that could help you to make sense of it as possible.
- 11) **Disseminate Your Findings** – Decide how you would like to share what you have learned with others. This can take any number of forms, including an article, a conference presentation, a mashup, a movie, a poster, a PowerPoint presentation, a website, etc. No matter what format you choose, you should be sure to include the following information:
 - Research Question
 - Research Process
 - Data Collection Tools
 - Method(s) of Data Analysis
 - Findings
 - Your Interpretation of the Findings
 - What You Learned About Schools, Teaching, Learning, & Inquiry From the Project